

Evolution

by ThePlottingHousewife

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Summary: Zayeed Winner, founder of The Human Perfect Project, makes miracles happen in the laboratory by creating genetically engineered children. It's only when it's too late that he discovers playing God can result in catastrophic consequences.

1. The Godfather of Human Evolution

****_Mad Scientist!Zayeed Winner. Dark!Pilots. Eventual 1x2, 3x4, 5x12, + Treize x Une. AU, yaoi, quasi-dark, genetically engineered pilots, test tube babies, lab-created Gods, pseudoscience._****

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><p>If there was anything...anything in the world that Zayeed Winner hated, it was that title. The little pansy-ass editor of Genome, the snottiest and most pretentious science magazine in existence, had unofficially named him that while piss drunk at the launch of his newest project. It stuck like shit to a newspaper and now everyone and their goddamn brother had to call him that every time they saw him. It was usually accompanied by a hearty slap on the back which made Zayeed want to make a necklace out of their teeth.

His brightest and most renowned idea to date was responsible for the unwanted attention. It wasn't exactly something he was proud of when he considered that it had come to him in his second year of grad school at three in the morning after a Friday night kegger. A few dozen beer bongs later and he was sprawled on the floor of his flat, furiously scratching equations on the back of an empty pizza box with a hot pink, pompon-tipped pen. He wasn't even completely sure what he was doing until he woke up around noon the next day with his face smooshed against the carpet.

It occurred to his hungover mind, between puking up a week's worth of cheap beer, that he'd just written down the formula to create a

prototype human being. From scratch. It dawned on him how dangerous this revelation was, especially if this formula got into the wrong hands. Feeling exceptionally paranoid, and not just from the residual effects of all the ganja he'd smoked, he quickly copied the figures into a journal and carried the pizza box out to the parking lot of his apartment building and burned it into a pile of ash.

That journal was never far away from him and he all but threatened the lives of anyone who dared touch it. He revered it, like some kind of ancient relic, intrigued by the concept, but terrified of it at the same time. He would often stay up late at night, reading it over, considering the possibilities. It was a dangerous idea that was likely to garner lots of controversy, but one that could potentially change the landscape of human progression. It could lead to cures of common ailments, allow amputees to grow their own missing limbs back, initiate the regrowth of healthy cells. Organ transplants would be a thing of the past. A patient suffering from organ failure could simply grow themselves a new one. It could reverse the aging process, all but eliminate age-related diseases and conditions...the list of possibilities when on and on.

The idea that he could be playing God didn't faze him much considering he didn't believe in any. That was simply a tactic used by those who feared progress. He was a scientist and this was what scientists did. Made new discoveries, improved on old ones. In a sense, they were gods. They could create a new species with a petri dish and turkey baster, for Christ's sake, and watch the little critters multiply and colonize their surroundings while their human creators watched them through a microscope and munched on French fries.

It sounded close enough to Zayeed. What did being a god entail anyway? Scientifically wired, the idea of playing such a being intrigued him, tempted him, and as the years went by, that temptation called to him more and more.

He'd started out in a small lab working with a few other doctors on the effects of cross-breeding, but late at night, he would work alone after everyone else went home. Theoretically, his idea was sound, flawless, but the execution was much more difficult. Manipulating and tweaking different single-celled organisms in order to construct a strand of human DNA was challenging to say the least. When he'd managed to succeed in creating one strand and build upon it, it would die. The matrix of information that went into creating the complexities that made up a human being was a daunting task and he'd spent many a night in his tiny little lab screaming in rage as he threw glass beakers across the room.

For a time, he scrapped the project, at a complete stand-still. He'd managed to create a new strand of virus and that had been the spectacularly pitiful highlight of his progress.

He was transferred to a larger, more state-of-the-art lab a year later, just outside of the Sanq kingdom, thanks to his promising work which involved cloning red blood cells. This achievement won him the Nobel Prize in Science and Medicine and paved the way for promising treatments for patients who suffered from a myriad of bleeding disorders and injuries. It was there that he'd met Quatrine, a fellow scientist, and the woman of his dreams.

Quatrine was working in Bio-Level Three, studying semi-treatable contagions. Zayeed was smitten from the moment he laid eyes on her and asked her out for coffee the following week. She accepted and the two hit it off beautifully. Quatrine was sweet, funny, and incredibly sharp. She'd had a hand in developing vaccines for hard-to-treat influenza, and she'd published a paper that helped lead to an effective cure for Tuberculosis.

In the weeks and months that followed, the two doctors became quite immersed in their little romance and it was only six months later that Zayeed had gotten down on one knee in the middle of a busy café in Paris and asked her to be his wife. She happily accepted and by the following September, they were wed.

Quatrine desperately wanted a child, but that was proving to be more difficult than they'd originally thought. Zayeed found himself having to make love to his wife on a schedule, as spontaneity could result in a failure to conceive. Often times, he had to leave work in the middle of a project because she'd called to tell him she was ovulating. And month after month, he would hold her as she wept through one menstrual cycle after another.

It was then that he began to seriously consider picking up where he'd left off. If he could somehow make it possible for Quatrine to have her child, then it was worth the endless hours of grueling and frustrating work. Unfortunately, he still couldn't create a DNA strand that wasn't fatally flawed, but he could start with a sperm and egg, creating the child for her. In this, he hoped he could later reverse the process with a subsequent egg and sperm. His goal was to watch the creation of life go backwards in time and trace it all the way down to its most primitive process, to the very first steps. It was his best chance of succeeding at his original concept. From there, he might be able to build a successful strand of DNA that was strong enough to endure manipulation.

Quatrine was reluctant to do it that way, but she'd begun to realize that it may never happen naturally. Zayeed assured her she could still carry the child after he implanted the fertilized egg into her uterus. She agreed. It was the best they could do.

Zayeed extracted ten eggs from Quatrine's ovaries and added his sperm to each one separately. His original intent had been to just let nature take its course from there, but as a scientist, he wondered what else he could do to improve their chances of a successful child. He began to ponder the possibility of removing certain predetermined traits, such as a predisposition for cancer, or heart disease. He wondered if he could make the child more intelligent and more prone to positive behaviors, like a competitive personality, a drive to succeed. He realized what he was holding in his hands and the prospects, the endless possibilities stretched out before him. Oh, the things he could do! The kind of person he could _create._ With his own two hands. He could make anyone he wanted. In essence, the perfect child.

He began tinkering with the development process, extracting the DNA information from both his sperm and Quatrine's eggs. He immediately located some of the more dominant problematic traits, singled out a propensity for prostate cancer in his own genetic line, and a predisposed risk of pulmonary disease and depression on Quatrine's side. He eradicated both with minimal issues and tweaked the physical

platform to create an optimal health profile. Every negative trait he could find, he removed from the first two specimens and waited to see what would happen. The first specimen seemed to be of inferior quality and died off pretty quickly. The second one struggled, but survived. Zayeed noted some genetic weaknesses that resulted from the testing and destroyed it.

He tried with the third and had more success, but it still didn't come out as strong as he'd liked. When he manipulated the fourth one, he was astonished at what he saw. The fourth specimen not only survived the process, but flourished. Both its physical and emotional profile far surpassed his expectations. He'd successfully isolated every physical and mental black mark from the specimen and removed it and the specimen came back stronger than before. He set that one aside so as not to possibly destroy it with any further testing. He wanted a good specimen to implant into his wife should his further experiments fail and this would be the fallback one.

He repeated the same procedures on the fifth and sixth one. Both died. He proceeded onto the next two and got the same result with the eighth that he did with the fourth. Now it was time to see what happened when he added some traits. He isolated the genes that controlled the most basic functions of intelligence and cognition and increased them to twice their capacity. So far, so good. He tripled the intelligence quota and the specimen seemed to do just fine. He increased its problem solving capabilities to four times its original capacity and watched in wonder as the specimen easily adapted to the changes.

Nearly drunk with elation, he singled out a trait for photographic and eidetic memory and tweaked it into dominance. He laughed giddily as the specimen took that too, with relative ease. He increased its endurance and stamina and clapped his hands when it was accepted. Holy fucking shit. He was consumed by a rush of adrenaline like he'd never felt before.

It didn't occur to him that he may have been overdoing it. It didn't occur to him that this process might result in an unforeseen, but negative effect. Something like this had never been accomplished before, not with any semblance of success, and he was planning on putting this unvetted specimen into his wife with the intent of it growing into a person. It never occurred to him that something could go horribly wrong. All he could think about were the endless possibilities, the name he'd make for himself by creating the very first perfect human being.

This child would essentially grow up with intelligence far superior to those already well-into adulthood, including his own, with gifts that far surpassed the talents that any of his naturally born peers could ever hope to accomplish. This child would blow them all out of the water with little effort. Zayeed cackled and rubbed his hands together. His name would go down in history. He'd just made the first leap in the creation of a flawless race of human beings.

He watched with unbridled pleasure as the fertilized egg, with all its new and improved traits, divided itself into more and more cells. The developing zygote the literal first of its kind. In the morning, he would implant it into his wife's womb. He couldn't wait to watch their child grow up, couldn't wait to watch him, or her outshine every other child out there.

He returned home to find Quatrine collapsed on the floor, not breathing. Panicked, he called for help and administered mouth-to-mouth resuscitation until they arrived. The paramedics did all they could, but they were unable to revive her. An autopsy later revealed that she'd died of a sudden brain aneurysm.

Grief-stricken, Zayeed scrapped the project once again, placing the surviving embryos in cryogenic stasis. It was two years later when he'd, on a whim that he couldn't explain, pulled them back out. He could still go through with it and this way, he'd still have a piece of Quatrine with him.

He prepared two incubating tubes with synthetic amniotic fluid and placed both the fourth and the eighth specimens inside each one and watched the magic happen. By the third week, specimen number eight had died, but number four was thriving, and by the sixth week, the monitors had picked up a heartbeat. By week nine, the embryo was moving the stumps that would soon develop into arms, legs, hands, and feet. Against his better judgement, Zayeed interfered with its development once again. He still had two more eggs to work with if this one didn't pan out.

He gave the embryo the same advanced intelligence, stamina, and endurance that he'd given specimen number eight and removed any propensity for health problems. He added personality traits such as an affinity for music, science, and mathematics. He gave it impeccable problem-solving capabilities with lightning-quick cognitive reasoning. As a final touch, he added Quatrine's physical traits: blond hair, blue eyes, and her exquisite facial bone structure. Specimen number four handled the changes quite well and continued to grow at a steady rate. Its vitals were strong and by the thirteenth week, it had developed into an extremely robust fetus. He watched as the specimen progressively resembled a tiny human, watched as it curled its little fingers and toes and he laughed, delighted as he watched his creation thrive inside the tube. He was obsessed with observing every minute detail as the fetus moved its arms and legs, opened its mouth, and even had hiccups.

He'd already known that the specimen was male and Zayeed was awe-struck as he watched his son get bigger and bigger, filling out his tiny body, resembling a baby with each passing week. He watched as he responded to stimuli and underwent routine sleep and wake cycles. He watched his eyes open for the first time and even thought the child could see him at one point.

A few weeks later, the fully developed infant was ready to emerge from the tank and Zayeed carefully pulled him out, suctioned any remaining fluid from the baby's nose and mouth, and cried joyfully as the child took his first breath and howled in rage. Zayeed bundled him with blankets after checking him over thoroughly for any health issues. There seemed to be none. He held the infant close to his chest, tears rolling down his cheeks as blue eyes peered up at him with a sharpness that wasn't typical with newborns this young. The baby actually seemed to be studying him, memorizing him.

He wanted to name him something related to his wife. He started with the first four letters, "Quat" and tried to think of a fitting suffix. Quatrine was French and Berber. The baby was the fourth specimen and the sole surviving embryo. It came to him like an

epiphany. Quatre. It was perfect. A perfect name for a perfect child.

There was only one small problem. How was he to explain this to the world? He'd just created the world's first genetically engineered human being. This was big. So very big. So he did what any respectable scientist would do: he went to the media.

He realized later that that probably _wasn't_ what any respectable scientist would do, but his brain was so fried and he was so proud. He soon found himself at the top of the list of the most reputable scientists. The creator of the first designer child, a miracle worker...the Godfather of Human Evolution.

He launched the Human Perfect Project and dedicated it to his late wife. It became a scientific staple in the study and advancement of human genetics. Soon, he was creating children for couples who wanted a child, but couldn't have them. He would note their desires for a male, or female child, their wishes for the child to be an athletic, or musical prodigy, or to be a straight A student. To have brown hair, blond hair, red hair. To have blue eyes, brown eyes, green eyes. He extracted the eggs and sperm from the prospective parents and tinkered with their DNA, removing any genetic markers for preventable diseases and nine months later, the child would be removed from the tube. It would be checked over by pediatricians and then turned over to their parents.

The grants poured in with abundance and he used the funds to his advantage, spending long hours in his labs, rarely eating or sleeping. He employed a few other doctors that he'd personally vetted and could be fairly sure they wouldn't expose his secrets and violate his patent. He worked closely with a young doctor, named Sally Po, and the two got along well together. He employed her to study the developmental reversal process of the last two specimens, and one icy cold winter morning, long before the sun rose up over the horizon, the two scientists had mapped the reversal down to its most primordial state.

It was brilliant...genius even. Now, with only a few simple blood cells, they could create a human being without the need for eggs and sperm. They started out with two dozen specimens and gave them each different traits. They constructed new strands of DNA into something all its own. Several of the specimens expired while several others seemed to do well, but Zayeed and Dr. Po watched with breathless amazement as specimens one, two, three, and five, surpassed their expectations, easily trumping their surviving peers.

He gave Specimen One superior physical strength and a propensity to solve problems in the blink of an eye. Zayeed wanted him to grow up to be a blunt, honest person and didn't focus too much on amicability, or a need for etiquette. This child would be technically minded, able to decode complex algorithms with minimal effort.

He'd given Specimen Two the ability for speed and exceptional cunning, but he chose to give this one a much more friendly personality. Charming, charismatic, and slick. He also added a touch of humor and a distinct distaste for dishonesty.

Specimen Three also had superior physical strength, but was given a grace and agility that the others did not possess. He was engineered

to be larger than the others, but instilled with an ability to sneak his way around without being noticed. He was given a milder personality than his brethren. Friendly, soft-spoken, with a sense of humor.

Specimen Five was created to be quick-witted, hot-tempered, and highly principled. He was given a penchant for martial arts and superior fighting skills. He was created to be smart, stubborn, and argumentative.

Something Zayeed also didn't fail to notice was that they were progressing far quicker than they should have been. By the twelfth week, they were developmentally at the sixteen week stage and both Zayeed and Dr. Po were astonished. This was extraordinary!

As the embryos quickly became fetuses and developed in almost half the time of a normal human, Zayeed and Dr. Po looked at each other from across the work table, eyes wide in fascination and a little fear at what they'd done.

Within five and a half months, the four thriving fetuses were ready to emerge from their tubes, while their surviving peers continued to take the typical nine months. He couldn't be sure what happened to these four that caused the exceptional development. A mutation perhaps, but he hadn't noticed any red flags when he was creating them.

The four infants, all appropriately named Heero, Duo, Trowa, and Wufei, were taken home to be raised by him and his team of nurses, caregivers, and educators. They would grow up alongside Quatre, who was now three months old and developing beautifully, already looking so much like his mother. Quatre's motor skills were far more advanced than the average three month old. He was already mastering his pincer's grasp and was close to being able to sit up on his own. His vocalizations were more fitting of a six to seven month old, and his eyes...the perfect replica of Quatre's could easily focus on and track moving objects from a considerable distance.

Zayeed had been floored and rather unsettled the previous month when he'd come home one night and checked on Quatre, only to find the child staring at him with eyes that seemed sharper than that of someone five times his age. He knew, somehow, that Quatre not only recognized him, but was actually learning him, studying him and recording his movements and his interactions. It was as if the infant was taking intricate notes. He'd shivered, left the room and went to bed, though he'd been unable to sleep.

Quatre was his crowning achievement. He had been given unprecedented levels of intelligence, more so than his other specimens. The baby was already figuring things out, things that took a normal child several years to do. It made him uneasy. He realized that he'd been so excited by his visions of human advancement, that he hadn't prepared himself for the reality. The finished product right there in the flesh.

He groaned and flopped down onto his bed, arm flung over his eyes. He prayed for the first time in decades. He prayed that he hadn't just created something that would come back to bite humanity in the ass. He'd had the uncanny notion when he looked at his son, that he was Frankenstein, looking into the eyes of his monster.

2. The Perfect Soldier

"Heero. Heero, look at me."

The five year old turned his head away from the wall and blinked up at Zayeed. His blue eyes were blank, vacant, and Zayeed got the feeling that the child knew what he'd done was wrong. He simply didn't care.

Zayeed crouched down to his eye level. "Do you know why you're being punished?"

The child stared at him, eyes still eerily empty. Slowly, he nodded his head up and down.

"Why?"

"Because I pointed my gun at a person and I should never point my gun at a person without the intent to shoot."

He was reciting from the rule book and Zayeed wondered, as smart as the child was, if he was really comprehending the situation. Still, he'd surmised that much, which was an improvement. He nodded. "And why don't we do that?"

The child kept staring at him in that unnerving way. He opened his mouth, closed it, then tried again. "Because - because I could accidentally shoot someone by accident?"

"Is that an answer, or a question?"

Heero cocked his head. He looked utterly angelic and Zayeed gulped down his discomfort. Looks were indeed deceiving. The boy's gaze was so intense, Zayeed could have sworn it was burning a hole in his head. Then the child said, "But, what if I was intending to shoot that man?"

Zayeed was taken aback. He watched, stunned, as the child stared back, waiting for an answer. How did one respond to that? "Is - was that your intent?" His pulse had accelerated, breathing harder as Heero's eyes darkened. Or, was it only his mind playing tricks on him?

The child simply shrugged and turned back to face the wall. "Maybe, maybe not," he answered cryptically. "I'm going to finish my punishment now. Just let me know when it's over." He spoke with such authority and Zayeed almost wanted to laugh at the absurdity of the situation. He was being dismissed by a fucking kindergartner.

"Heero, that's not an answer."

"Yes, it is."

"No, Heero. No, it's not."

The child's head turned again, the faint hint of a sneer on his face. Zayeed suddenly felt like he was the child. He had the distinct

impression that Heero was not looking at him, but looking down on him, as though he were an inferior creature. Zayeed was far too disturbed by this development to be offended. "Well, what kind of answer would you like, Father?"

The way the child said "Father" was a very deliberate slight, his voice dripping with disdain. Zayeed ignored it, for the meantime.

"An honest one."

Heero's blue eyes narrowed and he studied Zayeed like a fly under a microscope. "No, I don't think you would." He glanced at the clock on the wall behind Zayeed's head. "I still have ten minutes left." He turned back around to face the wall without another word and Zayeed was too overwhelmed to question him further.

He left the room, only to have little Duo smack into his legs as he tore down the long hallway. "Whoa, little guy. Slow down, okay? I don't want you hurting yourse - hey, what do you have there?"

"It's a scythe," the child answered happily, showing it to Zayeed.

"Did you make it?"

"Yep!"

"Wow, that's very good, Duo." It actually was. It was made out of black and gray construction paper and Duo had even drawn a face on the blade part. Zayeed examined it further, shuddering as he took in the sharp teeth and angry eyes that had been scribbled with red crayon. "Who's this?"

"It's Death."

Zayeed had to do a double take, unable to believe this five year old child had just said that. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Death."

"Oookaaay...why do you have Death drawn on your scythe?"

Duo looked at him as if he was nuts. "Because it's a Deathscythe," he said, enunciating the words like he was talking to someone who was a little slow on the uptake.

Well, that made all the sense in the world then. "Alright." No, Zayeed wasn't disturbed at all...okay, maybe a little.

"Is Hee-chan going to be done soon?"

"Uh, well no. He still has to do his studies after his time out. Then he can play."

Duo shot him a strange look and Zayeed almost took a step back. It was gone as quick as it came and then Duo was smiling brightly again. "Okay," he chirped. "See ya!" He took off down the hallway and Zayeed watched his retreating back as he collided with another staff member

then disappeared around the corner. Huh. That was weird. For a moment there, it almost felt like the child had been planning his untimely demise.

He checked his watch. "Okay, Heero, time's up." He placed a hand on the door to push it open when it was suddenly yanked open from the other side. Heero stepped out and strode past him, not ever bothering look at him. "I know."

* * *

><p>Zayeed couldn't say that Heero was his most difficult child. That honor probably belonged to his own flesh and blood, Quatre. But Heero was most definitely his scariest child. Unlike Quatre who came from his sperm and his wife's egg, the other four boys were a conglomerate of varying genetics built from the blood of anonymous donors. In Heero's case, he'd singled out Japanese, Irish, and Italian ethnicities. The combination was striking as the child had a mix of Asian and European features. His distinctly almond-shaped eyes were a bold, cobalt blue.<p>

The boy was intensely serious with very little of the typical rambunctiousness that often accompanies boys of his age. He was strangely quiet and when he did speak, he spoke directly, bluntly, and with the air of someone who knew, at the age of five, that he was already leaps and bounds ahead in terms of intelligence. He also had an unnerving knack for staring through you like you were some obstacle that was in his way.

At the age of two, he was reading at a sixth grade level, and by the age of three, he'd announced that he wanted a BB gun with the confidence of someone who knew he was going to get one, even though Zayeed had not been planning on it. And Zayeed had told him as much. He remembered clearly how the boy had looked at him, almost as if to say, _How dare you?_

Zayeed tried to explain to him that he was just too young and he'd have to wait until he was older. Heero stared at him with those laser eyes for several minutes, then turned on his heel and stormed from the room. He locked himself in his bedroom for a solid week, refusing to come out. Not even to eat.

Duo, who was the closest to him had walked up to Zayeed on the evening of the seventh day and informed him that Heero was going to starve himself to death unless he got a gun. Zayeed smiled and placed his hand on the boy's shoulder, but immediately took it away when Duo looked at it like it was poison.

"Don't worry, Duo. He's not going to starve himself to death."

"Yes, he will."

"No, he won't."

"Yes, he will."

"Duo -" Zayeed pinched the bridge of his nose, exasperated. How to explain to a three year old that Heero would eventually be driven by instinct to eat once he got hungry enough, though Zayeed had to admit he was impressed with Heero's stamina. He'd held out much longer than

he thought possible.

"He will, Father. And he'll die. And I'll have to take him to his eternal resting place -"

"What do you mean you'll have to take him?"

Duo puffed his little chest out. "I am the God of Death. It's my job."

Zayeed was stunned into silence. Where in the world did a three year old get an idea like that? "Yeah, okay. No more TV for you before bed. And as far as Heero is concerned, I can assure you he will eat before he dies."

But little Duo shook his head. "But he won't. You don't know him like I do. He'll die...and it'll be all...your...fault..." Duo's eyes were comically wide when he said that, but there was nothing funny about it. Zayeed looked into those indigo eyes and saw the promise of horrible things if that were to happen. Duo turned away then, and slowly walked from the room, but he watched Zayeed over his shoulder as he left, his face stormy with the prospect of doom.

Zayeed sat in his study for nearly an hour, frozen, completely gobsmacked, and utterly creeped out. He didn't want to give in to the child. If he learned he could get his way by behaving like this, then he would do it every time he wanted something. At the same time, he found himself actually scared. What if Heero did wind up killing himself? Or at the very least, cause his little body some serious damage by not giving it the necessary nutrients that it needed.

He relented only because he began to seriously worry that Duo was right. He couldn't believe he was caving in to a three year old, but the consequences, at least his his mind, was not worth the price of a toy.

He knocked on the boy's door and waited for a reply. It was ominously silent for several minutes. Long enough for Zayeed to begin panicking that the child had already collapsed from hunger. He was preparing to shove his shoulder against it and break it down when he heard a tiny voice on the other side.

"What do you want?"

"Heero, it's me. Can you let me in?"

More silence, then. "Why would I do that?"

A muscle in Zayeed's jaw twitched and he huffed in irritation. "Because I'm your father."

"You're not my father. My father is some guy from Japan who donated blood for beer money."

"Wh - how the -" How the fuck did he know that? "Heero, open the door."

"What if I don't?" And now the child was challenging him. Zayeed raised his eyes to the ceiling, blood pressure reaching dangerous levels.

"Then I'm going to break it down."

He was quiet for a minute and Zayeed almost thought he was going to unlock it. Then he said, "Go ahead."

"Why you little - fine." Fine. If that was how he wanted to play.

Unfortunately, the door was a lot harder to break than he'd thought, even with his adrenaline running on high. He shoved his shoulder into it like he'd seen in numerous films. It hurt. It hurt and the door still wouldn't give. He cursed as he bounced off it again and again, glancing around to make sure no one was watching this indignity.

Holding his aching shoulder, breathing hard and now particularly fed up, he stood in front of the door, raised his fist, and bellowed. "Heero, you open this door right now, or I'll -"

He stopped when he sensed someone nearby and spun around to find Duo standing a few feet away with wide eyes. He whispered in a tiny voice, "You'll what, Father?"

Zayeed couldn't remember the last time he'd blushed, but now he could feel the burn as the blood rushed to his face. "Eh-heh..." He rubbed the back of his head. "Nothing - nothing, Duo. Run along and play with your brothers, okay?"

"You're not going to hurt him, are you..._Father?_"

"Duo! How could you think - of course not. When have I ever hurt any of you? No, I just want to talk to him, okay?"

Duo stared at him as he took a step back, then another. Zayeed watched his snail-paced retreat, their eyes locked in a proverbial stand-off. Finally, Duo spoke. "Good. Because if you hurt him...that would be a very bad thing to do."

Was this kid threatening him? Or simply telling him that hurting Heero would be bad? "Uh...yeah, Duo. It would be. Go find your brothers, okay? It's time for your snack. I'll bring Heero down in a few minutes."

Duo's eyes shined with something he couldn't decipher and he had the almost uncontrollable urge to run away screaming. But he remained frozen in place. Duo suddenly smirked, winked, then whirled around and ran down the hallway, out of sight. Zayeed watched him go, scratching his head, and muttering to himself. "Damn, but these kids are some kind of weird."

He turned and jumped as Heero's door was now open and said boy was standing in the doorway watching him with an unreadable expression. When had he opened it? Zayeed never heard the click of the lock, or the handle. Heero's eyes bore holes into his head and Zayeed slumped, defeated, too exhausted by this battle to keep going.

Goddamnit. "Okay, Heero. You win. You can have your gun."

Heero's face split into a wide grin and while Zayeed should have been

delighted to see his rare smile, it spooked him more than anything else.

* * *

><p>Heero got his pellet gun and Zayeed was shocked to discover he was an automatic prodigy. A crack shot. He hit every single target head on, without fail. The incident that got him in trouble was when Heero pointed the gun at one of Quatre's caregivers as he tried to drag the hysterically protesting child off for his bath. Granted, it wouldn't do all that much harm, but it was the principle of the thing. You just don't point your weapons at people unless you're planning on the possibility of using it. Zayeed was disturbed that apparently, Heero had been planning on using it.

The child had never done that before. He didn't even point his gun at animals. Zayeed had walked into the room and was met with a virtual stand-off of almost laughable proportions. A five year old pointing a BB gun at an adult, eyes dark and sinister, while the adult stood frozen, unsure how to react as little Quatre dangled from his grip by the arm, howling like a banshee.

Zayeed rushed forward and grabbed the gun and the child and ushered him away, apologizing to the caregiver. He took him up to his room, berating him the entire way about the dangers of pellet guns. "If you can't be responsible with it, you will not be allowed to use it." He made the child stand in the corner for thirty minutes to think about what he'd done. Heero took the punishment in stride, standing with his face to the wall, still as a statue.

Zayeed took the gun for twenty four hours and told Heero he would get rid of it if he ever pointed it at anyone else. The child glared at him, almost in challenge, then shrugged and tucked into his supper. Zayeed sipped his wine as he watched him eat. He realized that everything Heero did was measured, calculated, controlled. The child would cut his meat into tiny pieces with careful precision. Then, he would take a bite, chewing thoroughly, no trace of pleasure, or disgust on his face. Heero didn't eat for taste like most children did. He ate for sustenance. Zayeed suspected if he set a cooked rat down in front of him, he'd simply pick up his knife and fork and get to it.

Zayeed just couldn't figure it out. He had five five year olds who were exceptionally bright and talented. Zayeed should have been thrilled by their development, but instead he found himself increasingly unsettled. It seemed there were eyes everywhere, watching his every move, waiting for a moment of weakness. Sometimes, they would look at him as if he was nothing but a wisp of smoke, sometimes like they wanted him dead. He'd taken to locking his door at night because he'd woken up once to find Heero standing next to his bed at two thirty in the morning. He didn't say anything, didn't even move. Just watched him silently.

Zayeed felt him before he saw him. He groaned and rolled over, cracking open his eyelids to see his five year old son staring at him in the dark. The moonlight that streamed in through the window cast eerie shadows along his face, giving him a haunted look. Zayeed jumped three feet off the mattress with a yelp, arms and legs flailing, hopelessly tangled in the sheets. If his life had really been in danger, he would have been screwed.

He took a few deep breaths, trying to calm his racing heart, and sat up. "Heero? You okay?"

The child continued to stare at him, unmoving. Zayeed wondered if he was sleepwalking. He waved a hand in front of the boy's face. "Heero! Wake up. You're sleep -"

"No, I'm not."

He paused, startled by the calm, almost monotone voice. "What?"

"I said I'm not sleepwalking."

"Then...what are you doing?"

"Just standing here."

"Doing what?"

"Watching you."

Zayeed was mildly concerned about his blood pressure as his head pulsed. He tried valiantly to remain calm. "I can see that. Why?"

"Because someone asked me to."

"Who?"

"No one."

He shook his head, at a complete loss. Untangling his legs from his rumpled bedding, he swung them over to the side and stood up, ushering the child forward. "Come on. Let's get you back to bed."

The boy obediently allowed himself to be led back to his room and Zayeed tucked him in. "Alright?" Heero nodded.

"Good." He turned to leave, disturbed, not sure he'd be able to get back to sleep after this.

"Father?"

"Yes?"

"How does it feel?"

"How does what feel?"

"To be human."

Zayeed was speechless. What kind of question was that? How was one to answer?

He never spoke of his musings, not even to Sally, though he figured he probably should. He suspected she may have also wondered the same things herself. Over the past few years, he toyed with the idea that his creations were not actually human. They weren't just odd, they

were...something else altogether. The question was on the tip of his tongue for a long time, but he'd never been able to ask it. Now, it slipped out before he could stop himself.

"What are you?"

He could see Heero's blue eyes, seemingly almost glowing in the dark. The child whispered, almost so low he couldn't hear it, but he did. And he wished he hadn't.

"A soldier."

"A soldier?"

"The Perfect Soldier."

"Well, you know, Heero. Good little soldiers follow orders."

"I know."

"Well, maybe you can be a good soldier in the future and mind me when I -"

"I don't follow your orders."

Well, then. "Whose orders do you follow?"

But, apparently Heero decided the conversation was over. He turned onto his side without another word. Zayeed watched for a few more minutes, overcome with affection, but also a helpless confusion. He simply didn't know how to reach these children. They were his creations, but he had no idea how to connect with them. It occurred to him that since he'd created such an advanced race of beings, that maybe, just maybe they were beyond his reach. He was the lowly ant looking up at a human God, trying to figure out what made them tick and he felt despondently unqualified.

"Goodnight, Heero," he whispered into the dark.

He didn't expect an answer. He didn't get one.

3. The God of Death

****_Warning: This chapter contains mentions of suicide._****

Duo was always calling himself The God of Death. He would tell anyone he came across, blinking up at whichever gobsmacked adult he could find, his eyes wide as he wove intricate tales of all the people he helped cross over to the other side. Some of them were so elaborate, Zayeed found himself floored at the child's imagination.

Duo was, in essence, an enigma. He was definitely the most energetic of the five boys, often driving Zayeed to near-catatonia from exhaustion. He never stopped moving, never stopped fidgeting, and he, sometimes infuriatingly so, never stopped talking.

The child was an obscure mix of several different donors. Eleven of them to be exact. His genetic line branched out from the northern British Isles to Anglo Saxon to Native American, peppered with ethnic

origins that encompassed nearly every part of the world. He was an adorable child with giant blue eyes that took on an almost purple hue in certain lights. His hair was long, never cut, not even once. The mere prospect of a haircut was enough to send him into a panicked frenzy, screaming bloody murder, and clawing at anyone who came near him with a pair of scissors. Zayeed eventually decided it wasn't worth the hassle and braided it for him to prevent tangles and keep it out of the way.

Despite the more serious nature of some of his other "brothers", Zayeed discovered, fairly early on, that Duo would have moods that were darker than Heero's and Wufei's combined. Fortunately, they were few and far between, but when they happened, they left Zayeed shaken for days afterward. During those times, the child barely spoke and his eyes took on a strange, unfathomable look, as if he knew things Zayeed could never possibly comprehend.

Duo was quick as a whip and when the mood struck him, he could have Zayeed rolling on the floor in laughter. Walking appeared not to be in his vocabulary as he was almost always seen running through the halls of the large estate like the hounds of Hell were on his heels. He was also usually screeching loud enough to be heard from one end of the house to the other.

He got along fine with the other boys, though he had a slightly tumultuous relationship with Wufei. Namely that he would push the boy's buttons to get him to respond which Wufei almost never failed to do, lashing out in such anger that Zayeed often had to separate them for a time to avoid a violent situation.

If there was one thing Zayeed loved about Duo, it was watching him interact with the others. He was very close to Quatre and he enjoyed watching the two of them work together as they tried, and often succeeded where Zayeed failed, to coax Heero and Trowa out of their shells. It was adorably funny watching them come up with new and rather inventive pranks to play on Wufei. While Quatre was exceptionally close to Trowa, Duo was extremely close to Heero. Zayeed was almost sure Heero told Duo, and probably the other boys, things that he never spoke of to him, but when he tried to get Duo to share the information, he'd get an odd look. It was hard to put his finger on, but it felt almost like he was saying, _You will never understand us so don't even bother trying._

He was intensely loyal and protective of his brothers and was often the one to make them smile when they were down about something. He was fun to be around, but he was tiring to a reliable fault. Zayeed had lost count of the number of times he'd developed bruises on his shins from Duo colliding with him as he ran like a bullet through the house, or the number of times he had to grab the child by the back of the shirt as he attempted to climb up the furniture. His favorite theme was the God of Death and Zayeed often found him standing on top of a book shelf, or a chest of drawers with a black sheet tied around his neck, proclaiming himself as the Reaper and that he was now going to bring death and destruction upon them all. Then, he'd leap down and hit the floor hard enough to shake the walls, and Zayeed would cringe over how that must hurt his feet. Unfazed, he'd tear out of the room, screaming war cries at the top of his lungs.

By the age of six, Duo was on his third nanny. The first one left in a hurry, crossing herself, and babbling incoherent prayers as she

stuffed her belongings in her bag and stomped down the stairs. When Zayeed tried to stop her, she slapped him. _You don't need a nanny. You need an exorcist!_

The second one lasted for three months, but unfortunately, she ended up committing suicide by overdosing on pills in the staff restroom. The third nanny seemed better equipped to handle Duo's endless hyperactivity and terrifyingly dark moods. At least, he hoped so. Duo seemed unbothered about the fate of his second nanny, but Zayeed took him to a professional, just in case.

He left the child in with the therapist for twenty minutes before she came out, scratching her head and looking extremely perplexed. She sat Zayeed down and told him that Duo was probably just going through the grieving process which was resulting in his odd behavior.

Zayeed stared at her, then said. "But...he's always been like this."

The therapist gaped at him. "You mean...this isn't recent?"

Zayeed shook his head. "No. He's just...always been like this."

She leaned back in her chair, suddenly looking as though she'd aged thirty years. Zayeed was morbidly curious how _he_ looked at this point. She reached into her purse and pulled out a small pill bottle, popping the cap, and shaking a few into her palm. She swallowed them dry and then stared at the floor for a few minutes. Zayeed absently wondered if this was normal for her and waited for her to collect herself. Finally, she seemed to snap out of it and looked at him with glazed eyes. She smiled, but it was obviously faker than the plastic tree in the corner of the room.

"Well, Mr. Winner. All I can say is you must have your hands full and I commend you for that. Children are very...interesting creatures and they come as different as can be. Just be patient and loving with him and I'm sure he'll come around, or - or grow out of it...or something..." She trailed off, looking lost again. Zayeed wondered what the hell Duo had said to her.

"Should we make another appointment?"

"No!" She blushed at her outburst and smiled to cover it up. "No, no. I don't think that's necessary."

Zayeed narrowed his eyes at her. "Okaaaay...do you have a card, or something just in case I need to get a hold of you again?"

She stared at him, tapping her fingers anxiously on the arm of her chair. He could see it in her eyes. She didn't want to give him a card and she didn't want him to call her. She certainly didn't want them to ever come back. Zayeed slapped his knees and stood up.

"Okay well, thanks for...nothing."

He stormed out of the room to find Duo gone. He looked at the receptionist. "Where's my son?"

"Hm? Oh, he went that way," she pointed to the exit.

"Gee, maybe you could have _told_ me?" He ran out the door, frantically shouting Duo's name. The honking of horns drew his attention and he turned, heart in his throat as he spotted Duo standing in the middle of the street, blocking traffic. His arms were raised above his head which was thrown back, his eyes closed. Zayeed could hear his little voice, hollering over the din as motorists honked and yelled at him to get out of the street.

"Behold! I am the God of Death. I hold all your puny little lives in the palm of my hand. Soon, you will bow down to -"

Zayeed grabbed him and ran for the curb, holding up his hand in apology to the people in their cars. He set Duo down on the grass and shook him by the shoulders. "Are you _crazy?_ What would make you _do_ such a thing?"

The child stared at him blankly, then he smiled his cheerful Duo smile. "Can we get ice cream?"

* * *

><p>Duo was usually the first one up in the morning and the last to go to sleep. Zayeed had a hell of a time getting him to bed and often listened to the child ramble on about his dreams which usually entailed him having to help lost souls cross over to the "other side".<p>

"And just where is this "other side", Duo?" He'd asked one night while he was tucking the child into bed. Instead of answering, Duo showed him one of his drawings that was pinned onto his wall with a brightly colored thumbtack. It was an exceptionally good drawing for a six year old. It featured a picturesque waterfall surrounded by tall trees. In the front, various animals grazed on the grass and leaves. Zayeed smiled at the boy.

"That's very good. It seems like a beautiful place."

Duo shrugged, a frown forming between his brows. Zayeed was confused by the sudden change. "What, you don't like it?"

"I've never actually seen it."

"Seen what? The afterlife?"

He nodded.

"Well, that's good, isn't it? I mean, you don't see it until you die, right?"

Duo gave him a knowing look. "But, you don't believe in that, do you?"

Zayeed sighed, not prepared for this conversation. "Well, let's just say that I believe in things I can see with my own eyes. I haven't seen the afterlife yet so I really have no idea if it's real, or not."

"But it is real."

"How do you know that if you haven't seen it?"

"I don't get to see it because I'm not dead. But, I've seen other places."

"Like what?"

"Limbo. It's where I'm from."

"Ohhhh...it's where you're from. And how do you know this?"

The child cocked his head cutely, looking at Zayeed as if he was stupid. "Because I'm the God of Death."

Ah, of course. "And your job is to help lost souls cross over to somewhere you can't see yet."

"I'll never see it."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't die."

Zayeed nodded. "I see."

Duo looked at him strangely. "I don't think you do, Father."

"What don't I see?"

The child seemed to be thinking something over. Then he shook his head. "Never mind."

"No, tell me."

Duo's eyes were intense as he watched him. "I don't think you'll ever truly understand what you did."

Zayeed's heart rate sped up. "What I...did?"

Duo suddenly sat up, his eyes alight with something that made Zayeed close to pissing himself. The child leaned in and whispered conspiratorally. "You haven't realized this yet, but while we're your creations, we're also your Gods. Soon, we will do things that you've never imagined." Duo looked him up and down, critically. "And when you die, I will be there. I will be there and I will reap you."

Zayeed gulped as Duo smiled at him. As if this was nothing. As if he hadn't just scared ten years off Zayeed's life. He could actually feel the hair on his head turning white and he absently reached up to touch it.

He watched with an iron lump in his chest as Duo laid back down and snuggled under the covers with a "Goodnight, Father," and closed his eyes. He couldn't seem to get his own voice to work. He nodded, stunned, and rose up to leave the room, flicking the lights off and closing the door. He went to his own room and shut the door behind him, making sure to lock it, and then leaned against it, his heart pounding against his rib cage. Shakily, he stumbled over to his bed and flopped down, still fully clothed and too exhausted to do anything about it. He buried his face in his pillow and thought about

Quatrine. He missed her so damn much.

He broke down for the first time since she died and wept into the silence of the night.

Like clockwork, Duo was up at the crack of dawn and he raced down the stairs to the kitchen where Zayeed was enjoying a cup of coffee and a few minutes of peace before the boys got up. Duo skidded into the kitchen, sliding across the floor in socked feet, coming to a stop in front of Zayeed. He bounced happily, his braid swinging behind him as Zayeed asked him what he wanted for breakfast.

There was no trace of the seriousness of their discussion last night. Zayeed wasn't even sure the boy remembered. He was still deeply disturbed by it and wondered if he should be seeing a therapist.

"Okay, Duo. Settle down. What do you want to eat?"

"Sugar pops!"

"Uh...no. You are not filling up on sugar this early. What else?"

"Gundam O's!"

"Gun - what? What is that? Is it sugary?"

The boy nodded.

"Then, no. What else?"

"Gundam Tarts!"

"Gundam - the hell is a Gundam anyway?" He sifted through the pantry, looking critically at the excessive number of cereal boxes. He spotted the "Gundam O's". It was a corn based cereal shaped like giant mecha machines. He looked at the nutrition facts and nearly choked. Thirty five grams of sugar? "Who the hell bought these?"

"Miss Janice."

Zayeed grunted, making a mental note to have a little chat with Duo's nanny about the importance of healthy food and not filling an already over-active child up with sugary junk. "Here, these are much better," he said, pulling out a box of bran flakes.

He almost laughed at the face Duo made. "Oh, come on, Duo. It's not that bad. I'll cut up some fruit and you'll never know the difference."

If looks could kill, Zayeed would have been dead on the floor. He shuddered and turned away, retrieving a bowl and spoon and set it down on the table. Opening the fridge, he pulled out strawberries, grabbed a banana from the fruit rack, and set to work chopping them up for Duo's cereal.

"Father?"

"Yes?"

"Do you love us?"

Zayeed turned shocked eyes on the child. "Of course I do!"

Duo was eyeing him strangely. "You shouldn't."

Zayeed just stood there, stunned, at a loss. "Why not?"

"Because we -"

He was interrupted by Heero and Trowa entering the room and Zayeed decided to let it slide for now. He set up more bowls for cereal and gave them some fruit. They sat down quietly, not even acknowledging him, and began to eat with no complaints.

"Good morning, boys," Zayeed greeted. He got a nod from Trowa. Heero simply ignored him. He swallowed down his irritation as Duo loudly crunched his cereal, pointing his spoon at Heero.

"You had a nightmare."

Heero looked at Duo, then glanced at Zayeed, who cocked his head in curiosity. "A nightmare about what?"

Heero glared at him, then at Duo. "Nothing," he said, focusing on his food.

Zayeed didn't press the issue and just watched them eat while he drank his coffee, listening to Duo ramble on about some game he was inventing with Quatre. Said boy came in a short while later along with Wufei and he was momentarily stunned at how much he looked like Quatre. Quatre stared at him as he walked in and sat down next to Trowa who immediately offered him half his fruit.

Zayeed tried for a smile. "Good morning." Quatre watched him intently and he felt a strange pull in his mind. He couldn't explain it, but it actually felt like his thoughts were leaving his own head and traveling through the air into Quatre's. His consciousness unraveling like a knitted sweater. After another few moments, it began to make his head hurt, a dull throbbing in his temples. He cleared his throat and shifted on his feet, deeply uncomfortable. Quatre suddenly smiled brightly, looking like an exact replica of his mother, and chirped, "Morning, Father!"

The odd sensation lingered in his head until Duo poked Quatre in the arm and the boy turned his attention away from Zayeed. The pulling instantly vanished and it left him breathless as he leaned against the counter, feeling weak and drained. His mind also felt suspiciously blank, bordering on incoherence. He abruptly excused himself from the room, stumbling across the house to his study where he slammed the door and collapsed onto his knees, nearly hyperventilating.

What on Earth just happened? He could have sworn that Quatre had just literally sucked the thoughts, the _energy_, out of his head, his body. But how was that even possible? How in the hell could a six year old child do that? He crawled forward as the room tipped, his stomach suddenly protesting the coffee and just barely made it to the

waste basket where he vomited profusely. Shaken, he sat down, leaning against his desk with his legs sprawled out in front of him. He panted and desperately tried to get his bearings back. His body felt useless as he raised a trembling hand up to his forehead, finding it coated in sweat.

He didn't want leave this room. Ever again. He wanted to lock himself in and just lay down and die. He finally could admit to himself that he was absolutely terrified of his own children. His own...what had Duo said? They were his Gods? He groaned, feeling lost, alone, and overpowered. He curled up with his face on his knees, wishing there was somewhere, or someone he could turn to. Someone that could help. But he wasn't sure there was anyone who could. He squeezed his eyes shut, clutching at his legs.

What have I done?

There was a knock on the door, but Zayeed just couldn't deal with anyone at the moment. "Go away. I need a minute."

"Father?"

"I'm fine, Duo. Just go finish your breakfast. I'll be out in a few."

There was a soft creak as Duo cracked the door open and it was on the tip of his tongue to scream at the child, but he just didn't have the energy. He felt ancient, wretched. He lifted his head, his eyes trying to convey what he couldn't physically say.

Duo's lips curled up, just slightly. "I told you." He pulled the door shut again and Zayeed listened to his retreating footsteps. Exhausted beyond belief, he slouched onto his side, his eyes closing, and passed out cold right there on the floor.

4. The Silencer

If Zayeed had to pick a favorite as far as personality went, it would be Trowa. He was, hands down, his least high-maintenance child. Probably the most "normal" out of all of them, but that still didn't mean he was actually normal. Like Heero, he was very calm in demeanor, but mild in a way that Heero was not. He was by far, the most mature out of all the boys, often playing the big brother role despite them all being the same age. He was extremely well-read and spoke more like an adult than a seven year old child. He rarely caused any problems aside from the fact that he nearly gave Zayeed a heart attack over his obsession with walking the three story railing that overlooked the foyer.

"Trowa, you are not a circus performer and that is not a tightrope. Get down, please."

The boy would glance over at him with a raised eyebrow, then usually jump off, flipping in midair, and landing gracefully on his feet onto the marble floor of the foyer. Then, he would simply walk away, leaving Zayeed standing there with his hand over his chest as he tried to bring his heart rate back down.

The morning before Trowa's seventh birthday, Zayeed was strolling

through the entryway, mug of coffee in hand, on his way to get the paper off the porch when he heard a strange tinkling sound above his head. He looked up and gasped, mug dropping from his hand and shattering on the floor, splashing hot coffee onto his bare feet. Trowa was hanging upside down from the large chandelier, swaying gently back and forth.

"_Trowa!_ How did you get up there? Get down this instant!"

Trowa gave him a nonchalant upside down look and before Zayeed could shout a protest, he simply unhooked his legs and dropped headfirst, thirty feet down. Zayeed shrieked and held his arms out to catch the child. Trowa flipped at the final second before impact, landing in Zayeed's arms bridal style. They stared at each other for a few seconds before Trowa squirmed and Zayeed set him down, his nostrils flaring from his heavy breathing.

"Are you insane, son? Don't you _ever_ do that again! You could have been _killed!_"

Trowa was seemingly unfazed as Zayeed railed at him about how dangerous that was. He shrugged and said, "But I wasn't," then he turned and walked away.

By design, Trowa grew faster than his brothers in both height and weight percentiles. He was tall for his age, but nimble and light on his feet. Zayeed often never heard him enter a room until he turned around to find the boy a foot away, effectively scaring the shit out of him. When he talked, he was usually soft-spoken. The only exceptions were in reaction to his brothers, particularly Quatre. Trowa shared a connection with his biological son that was both special and extremely private. They gravitated towards each other like a binary star system.

Oftentimes, they would disappear together for hours at a time and Zayeed was almost never able to garner what it was they talked about, or did during those times. He would walk into the playroom to check up on them, frequently finding them with their heads close together, whispering in their own secret language. Zayeed was charmed by their closeness, but also unsettled, and possibly a little jealous that he could not connect with his own flesh and blood like that.

Trowa was a mix of Romanian, Russian, and Czechoslovakian. He was a handsome boy with startling green eyes that were amazingly observant for someone so young. One of his blood donors had been a circus performer and Zayeed had honed in on that while working with Trowa's DNA profile. As a result, he developed the gift of agility and a penchant for acrobats. He received no training, no tumbling classes as a small child. It developed as a natural part of him and he was exceptionally good at it.

Zayeed found himself increasingly impressed, albeit somewhat unnerved when witnessing his stunts in action. Amazingly, Trowa almost never stumbled, or lost his footing. He was inhumanly flawless and by the age of seven, Zayeed had built him an extension off the back of the house where he'd installed a balance board, trapeze, climbing ropes, rings, a pommel horse, and horizontal and parallel bars. Trowa spent a lot of his time in there, honing his skills, easily surpassing his professional level peers. He developed an upper body musculature that was both powerful and more adjacent to someone twice his age.

Zayeed had been completely stunned one morning as he snuck in to watch, to find him holding himself up by one finger as he stood upside down on the horizontal bar. Quatre was down on the floor encouraging him, bouncing up and down with excitement. Neither noticed him standing in the doorway as the two boys were far more focused on each other. Zayeed felt his heart stop in his chest as he watched Trowa balance on one finger when the impossible happened. His finger lifted from the bar about two inches and he hovered in the air, his body touching absolutely nothing. Zayeed was completely frozen in shock, not even daring to breathe as time seemed to stand still.

Just as quickly, the moment was over and Trowa's finger rested once again on the bar. He stayed that way for a second, then his hand gripped it and he swung down, spinning in the air, and landing on his feet in front of Quatre who clapped his hands and embraced the boy. Trowa's eyes caught Zayeed's over Quatre's shoulder and narrowed. Zayeed swallowed hard, blushing to the tips of his ears, and silently backed out of the room. He retreated to his study and leaned against the door, breathing hard, heart thumping like a base drum. _Holy shit. Holy shit, I did not just see that._

But he had. It was undeniable. He was realizing more and more that the boys had more abilities than the average human. Than even the most advanced human. He'd discovered that Heero possessed unbelievable amounts of strength and lightning quick reflexes when Duo had once jumped onto a piece of large furniture the wrong way, causing it to tip. It easily weighed a few hundred pounds, but Heero had sprung up and grabbed it, lifting it off the floor, and tossing it like a toy across the room before it could land on and likely crush Wufei who'd been sitting on the floor nearby. It all happened so fast, Zayeed's brain hadn't even been able to catch on to the impending catastrophe before it was already taken care of. The now shattered chest had been a family heirloom, but Zayeed was grateful for, though also terrified of, Heero's quick action as it could have killed Wufei.

Not only did he have to contend with that and with Quatre's mysterious ability to zap him of his thoughts and his energy, not to mention Duo's strange obsession with Death. Now he had this to deal with. He knew now that Trowa knew he knew, but he was almost positive that Trowa would never bring it up. The question was how to approach him with it and he wasn't even sure he would get an honest answer. Though he had no idea what an honest, or dishonest answer could possibly be.

He approached him in the playroom about a week after the levitating incident while he was working on his homework. Zayeed had a difficult time getting the other boys to leave the room, but he'd managed to bribe each of them into compliance.

Trowa never lifted his head during the negotiation process with the exception of tracking Quatre with his eyes as he left the room. Something Zayeed didn't fail to notice. Then, he returned to his work without a word.

Zayeed felt extremely awkward and unsure, completely out of his league as he approached the table and pulled out a chair opposite the boy, sitting down carefully. He felt more like a child asking his

father's permission to go to a concert rather than a father attempting a serious discussion with his child. He had no idea how to go about this.

Trowa wasn't any help. He simply continued with his studies as though Zayeed wasn't in the room. Zayeed cleared his throat and watched the boy as he glanced at his text book, then scribbled the answers onto a piece of note paper. "How's it going?"

Trowa's eyes flickered up for a moment, meeting his own, then looked back down at his work. Zayeed tried again.

"You're doing very good in your academics. You know, when I was your age -"

"You and I both know why you came in here, so why don't you just quit with the small talk and get to the point."

Zayeed blinked at the bluntness which was skirting the ice into the territory of rude. Get to the point indeed. He cleared his throat again. "Okay, well...I wanted to talk to you about what you did...back in the gymnasium."

"What about it?"

Zayeed laughed, but only because he was shocked that this was being treated like it was no big deal. Maybe it wasn't to Trowa, but to him, well...

"Well, as you must know, it's not something human beings are able to do -"

"I'm not a human being."

There it was. "Yes...well...I'm having some difficulty coming to terms with that and I -"

Trowa set his pencil down and propped his chin on his hand, looking at Zayeed like he was a fly stuck to paper. "What's there to come to terms with?"

A muscle in Zayeed's jaw twitched. "I - what makes you say you're not human?"

"Because we're not."

"How do you know that? What do you think qualifies as a human?"

Trowa's lips pursed for a moment. "Humans are a less advanced version of us."

"And what are you?"

"I...don't know."

Zayeed leaned forward, placing his elbows on the table. "Did you know that Duo says you're Gods?"

Trowa grunted and leaned back. He picked up his pencil and tapped the

eraser on the table top, glancing out the window. Zayeed pressed, "Is that what you think? Do you all think that?"

The boy's eyes flitted to him, so quickly Zayeed almost missed it, before turning back to the window. "Duo talks too much."

Zayeed decided to go for broke. "What does Quatre think?" He'd had the sneaking suspicion for a while now that behind the scenes, when the boys thought no one was looking, that Quatre was calling the shots.

Trowa's eyes narrowed, but he didn't answer. Still, Zayeed felt a thrill of elation as the mention of Quatre got a reaction. Nothing ever provoked a response in Trowa like Quatre did.

"Does he believe you're gods?"

"He's never said as much."

"But what does he think?" Trowa huffed, almost imperceptibly, but Zayeed caught it.

"What is your motivation for asking about Quatre?" The boy asked it with a slight air of defensiveness which intrigued him. Still, he wasn't sure why him asking about his own son would garner such a reaction.

"Because he's my son. Why shouldn't I ask about him? Why shouldn't I be curious about him? He doesn't talk to me. None of you do. Why don't you talk to me, why won't any of you just talk to me?" He was getting frustrated now, sick of these mind games.

"And what is it you would like to know?"

"What would I like to know? I'd like to know why Heero can pick up an object that weighs hundreds of pounds without breaking a sweat! I'd like to know why certain people that Duo comes in contact with tend to die shortly thereafter, I'd like to know how you can levitate in thin air, or how Quatre is able to suck my life force out of me from across the room, I'd like to know -" He stopped, his breath hitching.

There was a spark of something in Trowa's eyes that made Zayeed lean back, pulse suddenly accelerating. The boy's lip curled up in a sneer, his teeth clenched. There was a minute vibration that Zayeed barely noticed at first, then began to get stronger, more pronounced. He lifted his hands off the table looking down at it, then up at Trowa with shocked eyes. What the hell was that?

The look on Trowa's face was terrifying as he leaned forward and hissed, "I don't think you want to know what we're capable of. Are we Gods? I don't know. That may very well be, but I do know that in your eyes, and as far as the human race is concerned, that's exactly what we are. I can see it in you every time you look at us. And you made that happen. You are the reason why we're here and if it wasn't you, someone else down the road would have figured it out. As far as Quatre is concerned, he is the first of our kind. That makes him extremely special and very, very powerful. He may be your son, but he is my responsibility and he is my responsibility because I am the only one who can contain him. The things I can do pale in

comparison to what he can do, so I'd suggest you don't go digging in quicksand because you'll find yourself up to your neck in shit that I can guarantee you are not equipped to handle..._Father_."

The vibrations increased to the point that Zayeed's teeth clattered together. Overcome with terror, he barely had time to react, his breathing wheezy and shallow, as the table between them flipped on its own accord and flew across the room, slamming against wall and breaking into several pieces. It wasn't irrational to believe that Zayeed feared for his life at that moment, almost sure he was about to meet the same fate as the table. Instead, Trowa stood up and walked out of the room without another word, the bone-jarring vibrations fading as he left, leaving Zayeed sitting alone in the middle of the room, unable to move.

He couldn't even talk to them anymore. He was terrified of doing, or saying anything to them, unsure if the next time, they would actually kill him. He just didn't know what else to do, but offer them what they needed and leave them to their devices. Maybe they simply didn't need him. After all, they were smarter than he was. Maybe he was hindering them by interfering in something he couldn't understand. He felt like an obnoxious pet being swatted away by irate owners.

Being the most dominant species for a few billion years and suddenly finding out you are not at the top of the food chain was a hard pill to swallow. Finding out that there were other beings that held unbelievable amounts of power over you was a terrifying prospect and here Zayeed was living it every day. The boys tolerated him only because he provided them with the things they needed and wanted, but once they were old enough to provide themselves with those things, what would happen then? What could, what would they unleash upon the world once they were fully grown? How did one teach these newly born creatures to respect humanity when humanity barely had any respect for creatures they deemed inferior to them? What kind of example was Zayeed leading when he'd been among those who poked needles into innocent animals and injected them with innumerable amounts of experimental chemicals and diseases, all in the name of "science"?

He realized that humanity had finally reached the point of no return. The apex in their own evolution where the pinnacle of human advancement becomes their downfall. Where they eventually manage to create something greater than themselves and it destroys them. Where the desire to play God overrides common sense. Where they do what they do because they can, without stopping to wonder if they should.

And he'd started it all. With his own two hands.

He realized now that it wasn't only his own well-being that was at stake. The entire human race was at risk and it was his fault. His own fucking fault.

He dropped to his knees then, the dawning realization that he needed to take action, at war with his need to protect the boys because he loved them...God help him, he loved them.

Tears leaked from between his eyes, dripping off the end of his nose onto the carpet as Zayeed finally swallowed his pride. "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned..."

5. The Desert Rose

Sally, who'd taken a liking to Quatre right from the start, had once dubbed him a Desert Rose. Zayeed had snorted at the odd nickname, not sure where, or why Sally came up with it. It wasn't until a few years later that he'd realized the name had some merit.

The child was beautiful, resembling his mother more and more with each passing day. He was soft, delicate in appearance, and in mannerisms when the mood struck him. Considering his Middle Eastern ancestry, it became quite apparent that it had been a good choice. Not only for the beauty and gossamery appearance of a rose, but also for the thorns that accompanied it as it hooked itself into the flesh and drew blood.

Quatre had a way of doing that. Like Duo, he was extremely charismatic, but he possessed an air of authority that was both subtle and blatantly obvious. He could be sweet as sugar when he wanted to be, but worse than a spitfire during a summer drought when he wasn't pleased. And when he wasn't pleased, everyone and their brother knew about it. His brothers doted on him like he was royalty and Zayeed was very worried that it would go to his head. For a while it seemed to as the child appeared to be a spoiled brat, first howling when he didn't get his way, then seemingly howling for the sheer hell of it.

It wasn't until the child was eight years old that Zayeed began to question the reasoning behind that. His encounter the previous year with Trowa in the playroom had given him a new perspective on his biological son. As the very first of his kind, Quatre was, in a sense, a God among Gods, and as such, his abilities were on a much higher scale in comparison to his "descendants". He was, for all intents and purposes, a Phoenix trapped inside human flesh. As a result, it was often excruciating for him. Zayeed realized that as much as Quatre's behavior was painful to endure, it was a thousand times worse for the child.

His brothers seemed to understand this right off the bat and Zayeed wasn't surprised considering how they all seemed to be connected to each other, right from the start. Weaved together on a loom of instinctual kinship. Though they all loved each other impeccably, Quatre was the glue that held them together, uniting them in a brotherhood of solidarity.

As the boys grew older, their abilities grew stronger, branching out into other avenues. Zayeed no longer tried to push them into sharing themselves with him. He simply nurtured their abilities with unbridled support and unconditional love. He began to respect them as equals. It seemed to work and without feeling pressured to do so, they opened up to him on their own terms.

He noted, feeling a sense of hope for the first time in eight years, that they'd become a little less secretive and much less hostile, at least towards him. He realized that what had been lacking in their interactions was trust. They simply didn't know if they could trust him. It couldn't have been easy to rely on someone who was lower than they were on the evolutionary scale. Zayeed realized that he had the immensely important obligation of teaching these creatures a sense of

empathy and responsibility, not only for their own well-being, for the well-being of every living thing on Earth.

Quatre caught on relatively quickly and what Zayeed wasn't able to communicate to the other boys, Quatre was able to get his point across. The boys listened to him. In fact, Quatre seemed to be the only one they did listen to. They respected him in a way that Zayeed found fascinating to observe.

He'd been able to surmise that Trowa saw himself as a sort of guardian for Quatre. He'd said he was the only one who could "contain" him. Zayeed still wasn't sure what that meant, but he personally believed his biological son possessed abilities in his tiny little body that were far beyond the scope of anything he'd seen so far. He wondered if Trowa sometimes shouldered the burden, the way he'd seen them sitting with their heads together, deep in concentration. He wondered if all the boys did that for him. He simply couldn't imagine what kind of power the child had that it had to be under some kind of restraint, dispersed among his brothers to ease the agony of it. He wondered what would have happened to the child if he hadn't had his brothers around to help him. Would it have simply killed him? The power just too much for his frail human system? He honestly didn't know and it frightened him. Though he was curious about the extent of Quatre's abilities, he held out a sliver of hope that he'd never have to see it.

The bond that the boys shared was really something to behold and Quatre often acted as an Ambassador between Zayeed and his brothers. He seemed to understand him in a way that the other boys couldn't and Quatre was the bridge, the interpreter that translated the messages between them.

As a baby, Quatre had been horrifically colicky and would often scream at the top of his lungs during the long hours of night, usually prompting the other four babies to do the same. Zayeed figured that Quatre was simply waking them up with his wailing and set up another nursery for him at the other end of the house in the hopes that his screeching wouldn't wake the other boys.

He realized very quickly that it was a terrible idea. Sufficed to say, it hadn't worked. The other boys not only continued to scream, they screamed louder and longer than they had before. The sound almost mournful in tone. He'd taken Quatre to Sally, hoping something could be done about the colic. She checked the baby over thoroughly, gently shushing him when he began to fuss, then lifted him onto her shoulder, rubbing his back soothingly. She looked at Zayeed and shook her head.

"He's not colicky."

"What?"

"It's not colic."

"Then what is it?"

Sally looked completely stumped. "I honestly don't know. But if it's okay with you, I'd like to observe him overnight just to be sure."

Zayeed's shoulders sagged in relief. Maybe she could figure it out.
"That sounds great."

Sally spent the night in Quatre's nursery, doing everything she could to soothe the screaming child, while Zayeed attempted to comfort the other four when they inevitably sounded off in response to their brother. She carefully monitored him the entire night and by morning, while the babies were being tended to by their nannies, Sally and Zayeed sat down at the kitchen table together, frazzled, bleary eyed, with mugs of steaming coffee in front of them. Zayeed was anxious for the diagnosis.

"Well?"

Sally blinked and rubbed her eyes, her other hand wrapping around her mug. "So...it's not colic. It's - well, I think it's night terrors."

Zayeed was shocked. "Really? I didn't know babies could have them this early."

Sally shot him a derisive look. "You and I both know these are not typical children."

Fucking hell if that wasn't an understatement. "Yeah, I know. So what do I do?"

"My advice? Try putting him with his brothers at night. I mean put them all together. Like you said, the other boys are reacting to him. To his pain, or his fear. If they are close to each other, it might soothe him. Soothe all of them."

"Huh. Alright." Zayeed was willing to try anything at this point.

It worked. Like a charm. That night he placed the boys in the large playpen so they would all fit. He watched as they gravitated towards each other and immediately settled down to sleep. It was as if the angels had descended down upon the Winner Estate. It was quiet all night long and Zayeed wept in relief, thanking and blessing Sally in equal measure.

That had been his first real evidence that the boys were far more connected to each other than he ever thought possible. That evidence continued to grow as they did. They were virtually inseparable during the first few years of their lives, though they did show increasing comfort about being separated as they got older. Maybe it was because their ability to sense each other grew along with them and they didn't need to be in such close contact to feel each other. Zayeed wasn't sure. It was all just guesswork.

His encounter with Trowa a year ago had been a catalyst of a sort. It was the pivotal moment when he'd reached rock bottom and realized he wasn't as great as he'd always thought. That humans weren't as great as they'd always thought. It was when he realized that there were creatures out there that would always be greater, smarter, stronger, just plain better, and it was the first time Zayeed had come in contact with one. It made his pride sting horribly to realize he really wasn't shit on the cosmic scale, not even on a planetary scale.

He realized that he'd been treating the boys like incompetent children, and while they were indeed children, they were children who were leaps and bounds ahead of him. He'd always prided himself as a scientific genius and the revelation burned like a gasoline-soaked rag.

He'd spent a lot of time after that looking inward. At himself, at who he had been and who he was now. He wasn't a father, not in the normal sense. He took it upon himself to provide them with what they needed, including love and support, but he also gave them their space, and with time, they began to come to him instead of meeting his attempts with vitriol.

The incidents where he'd felt Quatre pulling his energy from him had lessened considerably, though it still happened from time to time, leaving Zayeed exhausted, unable to string a coherent sentence together for a while. To his surprise, Quatre approached him one morning, looking troubled. Zayeed watched the child linger in the doorway of his study, which was odd in of itself. Typically, the boys would just barge in without a care in the world.

"Quatre? Is something the matter?"

The child picked at the wood of the door nervously and remained silent, though he gazed at him like something was weighing on his mind. Zayeed couldn't fathom what kind of burden this eight year old boy could possibly have on his shoulders, but he knew it was at the very least comparable to his own. At least.

"You can come in, you know."

There was a slight pull in his mind, but it was gone in a few seconds. Then, Quatre came in, stepping carefully over to the chair opposite his desk. He watched as the child sat down, looking around the room as he tapped his fingers on the arms of the chair.

"Is there something I can help you with? You know I'm always happy to do what I can."

Quatre glanced at him and Zayeed's breath hitched. God, but he was Quatre all over again. The child opened his mouth, then closed it, hesitant. "Do we hurt you?"

Zayeed was stunned by the question. "What?"

"Do we hurt you?"

"I - well, what makes you ask that?"

Quatre's eyes shifted to the side for a moment, then back at him. "I know you cry...sometimes. When you think we aren't looking."

"Uhhh..." Well, this was unexpected. Zayeed tapped his pen on the desk as he thought his answer over thoroughly. Should he reassure the child, or be honest with him? He was fairly certain that the child would know if he tried to candy-coat anything and he didn't want to insult the boy's intelligence either. Honesty was the best policy after all. "You - well, you have at times, yes."

"Do we scare you?"

Fuck, yes. "You have done that, too."

More pulling, but only a little. He was gathering information, trying to get a feel for the effects they had on him. He backed away when Zayeed's head began to hurt. Zayeed realized he must have known that. In the past, Quatre would literally drain him until he was a drooling idiot for a few hours. Now, the child seemed to have more control of himself.

Whatever Quatre found, he seemed satisfied. He nodded and leaned back in the chair, pinning Zayeed with an intense look. "I'm...sorry about that. We all are."

Zayeed was too shocked to respond right away. He stared, wide-eyed at the child, trying to get his stuttering brain to work. "It's - well, it's okay."

"We don't always understand the effect we have on people. Sometimes...it's hard to realize that what we're doing might be harmful, or frightening."

Zayeed suddenly felt so elated, his stomach doing somersaults. _Is this actually happening?_ This was something he never thought he'd hear. Maybe he _was_ doing something right. "I know it can't be easy for you boys, but I just want you to know that I'm not your enemy. I never was and I never will be. I want you to know that I am always on your side, no matter what and I'd do anything for you guys."

Quatre seemed confused. "But...why?"

"_Why?_" Zayeed laughed, he couldn't help it. "Because I love you boys."

"Love...like I love my brothers?"

"Yes!" Oh, this was an incredible breakthrough that he never thought he'd get to experience. "Yes, that's exactly it. You would do anything for your brothers, wouldn't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, that's how I feel about you guys. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I think I do. I know you know this won't be easy for us, but we will try. For you. I realize we've never thanked you for anything. I want to thank you now. For everything."

He smiled, a rush of happiness thrumming in his system, vibrating every nerve ending in his body. He wanted to jump on top of his desk and do a victory dance. "Well, you are so welcome. I hope you boys can learn to trust me and you know you can always come to me if you need anything. Anything at all."

Quatre nodded, looking a little more at ease. "We'll try not to hurt you, or scare you. I hope you know it was never intentional."

Zayeed held up his hand. "I must say, sometimes I wasn't sure, but I feel much better now knowing it wasn't. I will be much more

understanding in the future if and when that happens and instead of getting upset, can I - I can just tell you what's happening?"

"That would be sufficient."

Zayeed laughed, despite himself. "Good. Thank you, Quatre. Thank you for coming to me with this and I'm so happy we had this talk. I hope we can have many more to come."

Quatre cocked his head, observing him. "Yeah. I hope we can, too." He smiled and Zayeed held his arms out. The child was hesitant when he went to him, but Zayeed was too thrilled to notice. He took his son into his arms for the first time since he could walk. Oh God, but it felt like magic. Tears brimmed behind his closed eyelids as he was finally able to hold his child. "I love you, son."

Quatre pulled away, giving him an awkward smile. "I'd better get back to my studies."

Delighted, Zayeed grinned. "Yes, I suppose you should. You boys can come down in a half hour and if you'd like, we can get ice cream."

"Duo would love that."

He laughed, feeling light as air. "I'm sure he would." Damn, but that boy loved his ice cream.

Quatre left the room and Zayeed could only sit in the wake of this new and amazing development, completely gobsmacked, the grin on his face permanently etched there as tears streamed down his cheeks. How many times had he done this exact same thing, only it had been in pain and fear? Now, the unthinkable had happened. A connection. He'd connected with his child for the first time since he pulled him from the incubation tube and with any luck, he'd be able to do the same with the other boys.

Unable to contain his excitement, he picked up the phone and called Sally. "I think the Desert Rose is retracting his thorns."

* * *

><p>Movie night began as it always did. With the boys arguing over whose turn it was to pick the video. Zayeed held the disks up out of their reach as he tried to remember who'd had last pick.<p>

"No, Duo. You picked last time. It's Trowa's turn."

Duo's mouth turned down in a pout, though he continued to bounce on the balls of his feet, his system still saturation with chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream. "But, he always picks the same thing."

Trowa was unperturbed as he slid the disk into the player and Killer Clowns From Outer Space flickered to life on the big screen. They may have been an advanced human species, but they were still, in essence, eight year old boys. "Well, you can play whatever you want when it's your turn."

Duo folded his arms over his chest and shot his brother a dark look.

Quatre caught it and sent Duo an even darker one. The boy relented immediately and sat down to watch.

Zayeed turned to leave the room, as he always did, when Quatre's small voice rose up over the introductory music. "Watch with us?"

He was shocked. Apparently so were his brothers as they stared at Quatre as though he'd lost his mind. He gave them all a look and they backed off, turning back to the movie.

Zayeed stuttered, "Are - are you sure?"

The boy said nothing, but Zayeed felt the answering pulse in his mind. Quatre wanted him to watch the movie with them. Would wonders never cease?

Feeling awkward, but ecstatic, he walked over to the couch and sat down. After a few minutes, Quatre got up from the floor beside Trowa and climbed onto the sofa, tucking himself against Zayeed's side and Zayeed nearly wept from the overwhelming feeling of joy.

It didn't take long before Trowa was getting up and situating himself next to Quatre, followed by Duo who snuggled into Zayeed's other side. It took a little longer for the other two, but eventually, Heero crawled in next to Duo. Wufei watched from the floor for a few more minutes, but a silent communication between him and Quatre made him stand and walk over to the couch, climbing up next to Trowa. Quatre smiled at the boy and lightly tapped his foot in reassurance.

Together, they watched the film and Zayeed couldn't remember the last time he'd felt so happy. It had been before Quatre died, he knew that much. He suddenly felt a sense of peace and home that he never thought he'd feel again. He was sure the other boys would come around with time. He wouldn't push them. This...this was enough. Finally being accepted, even if it was cautious. That was okay. It was enough.

"Father?"

Zayeed looked down at Quatre who smiled up at him. "I'm glad you're here."

He choked down the lump in his throat and whispered, "So am I."

"Quiet. Watching movie."

Zayeed chuckled. "Sorry, Duo."

6. The Dragon

Thanks for the reviews! Although, I'm a little confused about the "Dave and Mike" comment. :P

* * *

><p>Zayeed often liked to call Wufei his little Dragon. Little did he know how blatantly accurate that nickname was. He'd always thought

the name was fitting because of the boy's fiery personality. He was a stickler for routine and highly self-motivated. He was the one who often took on the air of authority when his brothers got out of line, berating them with cutting words. He had a temper that burned quick and hot. Fortunately, that also meant that it was usually over as fast as it came.<p>

He came from Chinese lineage, three of his donors were advanced martial artists. Wufei, like Trowa, developed those skills naturally as Zayeed had tweaked the child's DNA to make that a dominant trait. By the age of four, he'd mastered sword, staff and nunchucks and by the age of nine, was highly trained and developed in Karate, Taekwondo, Aikido, Jitsu, and Judo, as well as boxing and kickboxing. His physique was similar to Trowa's as he spent many hours in the Dojo that Zayeed built for him out of an unused room in the house.

He'd taken a liking to Tai Chi and meditation after a rather volatile incident when they were five. Duo had scribbled all over Wufei's walls with black permanent marker and, furious, Wufei went after him in a fit of anger. Zayeed had to separate the two boys, leaving Duo under Trowa's supervision while he tried to calm Wufei down. The child was so angry that Zayeed had not been able to reason with him, reassure him that they could paint over the marker.

Wufei stood in the middle of the kitchen and screamed in rage, so loudly that it felt as though the room shook and Zayeed jumped back, terrified, as one of the walls burst into flames. He'd been too preoccupied by getting everyone out of the house safely and calling the fire department, that it wasn't until later, once the shock wore off, that he'd been able to sit down and let the reality of what had happened sink in.

He watched the boy sleep that night, now quiet, calm and peaceful, and boggled at what the child had been able to do. Realizing with an icy cold chill that Wufei was a ticking time bomb...literally.

It had taken several thousand dollars to repair the damage done to the kitchen, but the damage done to his psyche after that incident was immeasurable. He'd consulted Sally over what to do and she was as lost as he was. Though she did suggest he sit down and have a talk with Duo about not provoking the volatile boy, which went over about as well as he predicted it would.

Her other suggestion was to help Wufei find more productive ways of dealing with his anger. He started encouraging the boy to meditate daily, on a regular schedule and also when he started to feel upset about anything. He was mildly surprised when the child took to it immediately, showing remarkable levels of self-discipline for such a young boy. Once Wufei had been doing that successfully for a while, Zayeed introduced him to other relaxation techniques such as Tai Chi and Yoga.

And the rest was history. Thankfully, there was only one incident after that where he'd set fire to his desk when he got frustrated over a particularly difficult math problem. The boy was furious with himself.

"I can't do it! Why can't I do it? I know this stuff. I'm smarter than this." He clenched his eyes shut, banging on the desk with his

fist.

"Wufei, relax! It will come to you."

"I shouldn't have to wait for it to "come to me". I'm almost as smart as Quatre. I should have figured this out minutes ago."

"Wufei, no one is perfect. Just work through the steps again and _"

"I am perfect! We are perfect. Only weak-minded fools would have a hard time with this."

"Now, that's not true, Wufei. You are being too hard on yourself. You just need to take a few calming breaths, maybe a little break -"

"I don't need a break! I need to figure this out!" He slammed his fist on the desk again. A spark ignited beneath his hand and before Zayeed could realize what was happening, the top of the desk burst into flames.

"Wufei! Watch out!" He grabbed the child quickly and got him a safe distance, then ran to a window, yanking the drapes down, and smothering the fire before it could spread. He coughed and waved the smoke away from his face, pulse pounding, as he glanced down at the child who looked heart-breakingly dejected. "Are you hurt?"

The boy sat on the floor with his head down, looking ashamed. "I'm so weak. I can't do this, I can't -"

"Yes, you can. You just need to calm yourself down before you start another fire, okay?"

But, Wufei was too far gone to listen to him, not that he would have listened anyway. Wufei often gazed at him with such disdain, it made Zayeed want to crawl under a rock. The child deemed anyone who wasn't his brothers as weak and pathetic, though he did seem to tolerate Sally more than the other low-life humans.

His brothers, having sensed the outburst came to the boy's aid, surrounding him with love and support, and Zayeed backed out of the room, feeling like he was intruding.

There was no doubt, even early on, that Wufei was a scholar. He was, as he'd said, nearly as intelligent as Quatre, but he took his studies far more seriously than the blond boy. He read constantly, educating himself on a wide spectrum of subjects ranging from literature to mathematics to science and history. He'd read all about the various atrocities of human history and often chided Zayeed about the shortcomings of his race.

"Why are humans so...weak?" The child asked one night during supper.

Zayeed nearly choked on his eggplant and took a sip of wine to wash it down. "Could you be more specific?"

"All the war and the famine and the _cruelty._...why do you do these things to each other? You are the same species, you're all kin. Why are you so cruel to each other? I can't imagine doing those kinds of

things to my brothers." He said it with condescension, but Zayeed could also see the spark of curiosity in his dark eyes. The almost desperate need to comprehend.

He nodded, understanding the child's confusion. "Well, that's good. I hope you never do. But, to answer your question, well...it's complicated. I suppose with our kind, there are so many of us and we have been around for so long and we're all so very different. The natural world is a very hostile place and there's a reason behind that. Life on Earth, for a very long time survived by our biology. Our instincts. Competition and survival of the fittest and you're right, it's very cruel. That's how many in the animal kingdom still survive to this day. Humans have somewhat evolved past that thanks in part to our frontal lobes," Zayeed tapped his forehead.

He continued, "But we still have those instincts, very deep in the most primitive parts of our brains. We haven't evolved past that yet." He set his fork down and leaned over. "I want you to understand that while there are many bad people out there, there are also people who are very good. Very kind and generous. Humans are a very diverse mix. You understand?"

Wufei twirled his fork through his pasta. "I suppose so. But, I mean, with all the technology, the ability to educate yourselves, why don't some of you know any better?"

Zayeed shrugged. "Part of humanity is still very ingrained with our own selfishness which can be traced back to our instinctual roots. Some people - some people just don't care, or don't wish to do better, to be better."

"But, why?"

"I wish I had an answer for that, but I don't. There are just some people out there who can't learn, or don't wish to. It's not pretty, but it's just the way it is."

"And we're the first of our kind, right?"

"Yes."

"So, there are more being made just like us."

"Yes, well. There were. I've actually postponed the project."

"Why?"

The other boys were staring at him silently, eyes wide in curiosity. Okay, this might get tricky. "Well...when it turned out that you boys had more...abilities than we were able to understand, we had to take a break to try to figure out what exactly happened. I don't...I really don't understand the processes behind why you boys are able to do what you can do and before I can move further, I need to find that out."

"But there are others like us. You made other children, not exactly like us, but...can they do what we do?"

"I've been in contact with some of the other parents and it seems

that some do, but I don't know if all of them are like that."

Duo spoke up. "Are we mutants?"

Zayeed coughed, nearly spitting his wine out. "Uh...well, it's possible that there was some kind of mutation during the initial process, or during gestation, but I haven't pinpointed any yet. That said, no. I wouldn't call you mutants."

Duo actually looked disappointed by this and Zayeed almost laughed. "But if I do find one, I'll let you know." Duo's face lit up and he smiled brightly.

Wufei asked, "Do you consider us gods?"

"Well, not exactly. The term "God" can be a tricky thing. Since humans have never met one, we really don't know what being a God would really entail. I guess it depends on who you ask. Some people might consider you a god because of all the amazing things you boys can do. I suppose I see you as just another step in the evolutionary process."

"But why can we do these things?"

"I don't really know, but if I had to guess, I'd say that somehow, during your development, we, or you, were able to tap into parts of your brains that normal humans don't have access to. We humans only use about ten percent. That leaves the vast majority of our brains a mystery. It's possible that you boys are able to use more of yours and that's why you are able to do what you do. Does that make sense?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"But that also means that you boys have powers that us regular humans don't possess. You can easily hurt us and that can and will scare people and humans don't always act rationally when they're scared."

"What do you mean?"

"Uhhh...okay. The thing is, people are going to see you as a threat. You are something they don't understand and that will scare them. Sometimes, when people are afraid of something, especially when there's a large group of people who are scared of something, it can be dangerous for whatever, or whoever it is they're scared of."

Wufei nodded. "I was reading about the Salem Witch Trials yesterday. That's kind of what you mean, isn't it?"

"Yes. That's exactly what I mean. Some folks died because other people didn't understand them and they were scared. I fear for you boys' safety because there are people out there who just won't understand you. That could put you in danger."

"Won't, or can't?"

"Both. Some people will have the capacity to understand you, but they won't be willing to. As you get older and your abilities get

stronger, people are going to become more afraid of you."

"Won't you keep us safe?" Quatre asked.

"I try. I try so very hard and I will do everything I can to make sure you boys are safe. I hope you know that."

They glanced at each other and then at Zayeed. Quatre smiled, "Yes, I think we do."

The boys were nine now and things had gotten progressively better in the last year. They were more cooperative and willing to listen. Wufei was doing well with his meditation and had no incidents of spontaneous combustion which was a relief to Zayeed. They were in a very precarious position now and every day brought new risks not only to the boys, but to the people around them. Zayeed and Sally both worked with them on a daily basis to find ways for them to cope with their abilities and channel their frustration in ways that wouldn't cause harm, or damage. It was challenging to say the least.

Considering Zayeed was currently standing behind a metal shield as Wufei threw one fireball after another at him, he could easily say this was one aspect of his life he'd never predicted.

"That's good, Wufei. Keep it steady." A ball of flames flew over the top of the shield and singed his hair. His nose prickled at the odor. "Alright, watch your aim. I don't want to be bald. You need to hit the shield." Luckily they were outside, otherwise the flames would have hit the wall.

This exercise was required as a way of stress relief for Wufei as well as taking care of the buildup of power. If he didn't let it out on occasion, it would condense inside him like a carbonated beverage under pressure. When he got agitated, it was like shaking the bottle. It was going to come out, one way or another. The trick was to reduce the build up of pressure so it wouldn't be so catastrophic when he did get upset.

These types of exercises were important for all the boys. Sally was currently working with Quatre farther down the yard. Zayeed discovered, with a revelation from Trowa, that Quatre had the ability to level entire cities, imploding miles of land like a hydrogen bomb. There was no telling what he could do when his power reached its full potential. That was in part why the other boys needed to shoulder the burden. It diluted Quatre's power and made it less painful for him.

All in all, Quatre and Wufei were his most potentially dangerous children and the ones who needed the most work. He was currently working on a suppressant, should the need for one ever arise, but he wasn't able to safely do so without posing a risk to the host. He certainly wasn't ready to conduct human trials to see if the compounds were safe.

He was knocked back a few feet by a particularly strong fireball and he wiped the sweat from his brow and held his hand up. "Okay. Time for a break. It's getting hot behind this thing. You want some lemonade?"

"Yeah!"

"I do, too," Quatre shouted from across the yard.

"Okay, go see what Alyia can fix up for you."

The boys tore off down the lawn and Zayeed and Sally watched them as they raced each other to the house.

"They're doing well," Sally said.

"Yeah, I'm surprised. For a while there, I thought this whole situation was hopeless."

"There's always hope. They're good boys. They just need the proper guidance like any child."

"And how," he laughed, glancing at Sally. "I want to thank you for being here for me through all this and helping me with them. I couldn't have done it without you."

"Oh, I'm sure you could have, but I'll take the compliment," she said, smiling.

"You've been a wonderful friend. The best I could ask for."

She gazed into his eyes and his chest fluttered in a way that he hadn't felt since Quatrine. Sally was beautiful, there was no doubt about that and he couldn't deny how much closer they'd gotten over the years. Feeling awkward, he coughed and looked away, taking a sudden interest in the surrounding Magnolia trees. "Would you like some lemonade, or some tea?"

She dropped her hand on his shoulder and his skin registered the warmth with a thrill through his nervous system. "I would love some." They walked up the vast green lawn and she added, "I don't bite, you know."

He turned shocked eyes on her and she gave him a flirty wink, laughing when his handsome face flushed red.

One of the staff members ran outside to meet them, flagging Zayeed with a waving arm. "Mr. Winner! You have guests."

"I do?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Okay, I'll be right there."

"It's Sir Treize Khushrenada and Lady Une."

Zayeed froze mid-step and glanced at Sally with wide eyes, heart suddenly beating harder. She mirrored his expression. "What the hell is he doing here?"

He swallowed down the rush of fear and walked towards the house, dread in the pit of his stomach. There could only be one reason the Senator was here, or rather, five reasons.

Sally cursed and followed him, praying this was nothing serious, but knowing in her heart they would not be here if it wasn't.

7. The Senator

Thank you for the reviews!

* * *

><p>Zayeed entered the parlor feeling like his chest cavity was filled with lead stones. He spotted the rigid back of the Senator near the corner of the room as the aristocrat gazed out the window. His eyes caught the stripes that were sewn on the arm of his pristine jacket and was reminded of how the man earned them. Through years of war and bloodshed. Senator Treize and his wife, Lady Une ruled with iron fists and Zayeed had to try to remember to keep his emotions in check.<p>

The Senator's wife stood nearby, looking elegant in her similar dress blues. Her brown hair was tied up in the ever-present buns that he'd always seen her in when she appeared on the television and in newspapers. Her eyes were severe and brown behind her glasses. Unforgiving. In a way, she was almost more frightening than her husband. He'd heard the rumors of the things she'd done in the Senator's name. Treize was the figurehead, the face of the law, but Une was the one who perpetrated his wishes. Treize barely had to lift a finger because it's was Une's finger who pulled the trigger.

Zayeed cleared his throat and the couple turned to him, both with schooled expressions of neutrality. He tried to mirror them, putting forth a calm exterior despite his pounding heart. He offered them an amicable smile and stepped forward with an air of confidence he didn't feel. Growing up with a rather high status himself, he knew all about the false cordiality that often accompanied interactions among those who were privileged. He extended his hand to shake that of the Senator's. The man's palm was warm and dry against his sweaty one and he felt an internal rush of disgust at how many lives this hand had taken. Being a pacifist at heart, he'd never been one for violence, particularly violence in the name of politics.

He gulped down the lump of trepidation in his throat and tried not to croak on the niceties he forced out. "What a pleasant surprise, Sir. For what do I owe the honors?" _Okay, Winner. That wasn't bad. You've still got it._ He turned to the Senator's wife and clasped her hand gently in his own. It was icy cold and Zayeed couldn't help but think, _Just like her heart_. He bent down and pressed his lips against the chilled skin feeling like he was kissing the hand of a corpse. "M'lady."

The Senator held a martini glass in his other hand that had been fixed by the staff while he'd waited for Zayeed to enter. The sunlight that streamed in through the window glinted off the numerous jeweled rings on his fingers and Zayeed figured he must have had at least a few million dollars on that hand alone. Treize's eyes were blue like a summer sky, but cold like the glaciers in Antarctica. He smiled, but it didn't reach those eyes. It never did. That smile was reserved for those whom he regarded as inferior, which was just about everyone.

"Ah, Dr. Winner," he said, his voice light and airy with a casualness that Zayeed knew was fake. "Not to cut right to the point, but my wife and I were very...interested in this little program you've started. You've made quite a name for yourself."

Zayeed blushed. It was unbecoming for a scientist to profit on his discoveries, at least publicly. He couldn't deny he'd increased his income exponentially since he'd launched the Human Perfect Project. "Well, I certainly didn't do it alone. I had help -"

"Ah, yes. Of course. I know you've been working with another doctor. Po, is it?"

He stuttered in surprise. "Y - yes. Dr. Sally Po."

"I know a lot about you, Dr. Winner. I've been following your stories in the media. I couldn't help but notice you've been dubbed the Godfather of Human Evolution. I'd say it's quite...fitting" His eyes twinkled over the rim of his cocktail.

Zayeed's nerves rankled. Damn, but he hated that nickname. "Yes, well. I didn't - that is to say, I didn't name myself that. A colleague -"

"Yes, I'm familiar with your colleagues, Doctor." Treize waved his hand like he was swatting a fly. "But, I'm not interested in them. I'm more interested in what you can do. What you've done."

"Well, I must tell you, Sir, that the project is on hold indefinitely -"

"I'm also not concerned about that."

Zayeed stopped short, confused. "That's not why you're here?" He chanced a glance at Une and found her eyeing him like a hawk, standing at her husband's shoulder like a bodyguard. "But, I thought -"

"Oh, that is why I'm here. See, I really don't care if you've put your project on hold. I'm here to tell you to reopen it."

"Sir? But...I can't do that."

"Of course you can. It's your project."

"I know, Sir, but with all due respect, there is a reason I've put it on hold. You see, there's an issue with the children -"

"Having abilities that go beyond what mere humans are capable of. Yes, I know."

"Yes. So...it's simply too dangerous for us and for the children for me to continue this project until I know what's causing these...anomalies."

"What kind of scientist are you, Doctor? Since when do morals and principles work to subdue the advancement of discovery?"

"I have a responsibility to -"

"I would think you already left responsibility at the door when you launched this project without further testing."

Zayeed clenched his jaw. Okay, that hit a nerve. "I know. I had...personal...reasons for doing what I did."

"And what would those be?" Something told Zayeed he already knew, but was fishing for him to say it anyway.

"My - my wife." It hurt to even say it. "My late wife, I mean. She wanted a child -"

"Yes. A child. But you ended up with five."

"My first child -"

"Quatre, isn't it?"

Shit. "Yes. He was created by combining my sperm and my late wife's egg, but the other four are different."

"Tell me how?"

"I used blood from different donors to build new strands of DNA. Quatre's DNA comes directly from my wife and I."

"So he was not built from scratch." It wasn't a question, but a statement.

"No. He wasn't."

"But, he has these abilities, too."

"Yes."

"And what are they?"

"I -" Shit, how much do I tell him? Zayeed didn't want to be caught in a lie. "I'm not sure the scope of them, or what his full range is. He's not fully developed yet, being only nine years old."

"But he's powerful."

"Yeesssss..." Zayeed said cautiously. "I just don't know how powerful."

"And are the others as powerful as he?"

"Not as much. Wufei comes close -"

"What are his abilities?"

Damn, he did not want to disclose this. "May I ask the reason for your wanting to know?"

"You may, but I can't promise I'll tell you. I will tell you this, though. I will know if you're lying, or withholding information from me. I don't need to tell you that wouldn't be a good thing, do I?"

"No, Sir. Uh...well, as far as I can discern, he can - well, he can create fire."

The Senator's eyes widened, partly in shock, but there was a degree of savage interest in the icy blue depths that made Zayeed's stomach turn. "Fire, you say?"

Zayeed nodded, defeated. "Yes."

Treize sunk down in an armchair, crossing one leg over the other and stirred his drink. "I see. You realize what you've created don't you, Doctor?"

He did. He was pretty sure he knew where the Senator was going, but he didn't want to admit it. He remained silent.

Treize smiled like the cat that got the cream. Like a snake cornering his prey. That was exactly what Zayeed felt like. Prey. "You've created the world's most powerful weapons. Do you realize what we could do with these kids?"

Dread dropped into his stomach and he wiped beads of sweat from his brow. "Sir. These are children, not weapons -"

"Oh, but they are. Especially your own offspring and that Chinese boy. Don't you understand, Doctor? The power we could wield with the minds of those kids. The world would be at our fingertips. Complete domination." Treize leaned back in the chair, grinning. "You are a brilliant, man, Dr. Winner."

"Thank you, Sir, but these children aren't meant to be used as weapons."

"You say this as if you have any choice in the matter."

There it was. He breathed hard through his nose, trying not to let his anger show. This man would use these kids as weapons over his dead body. Maybe that was what the Senator wanted. Treize leaned forward, placing an elegant hand on his knee as he set his drink down on the small table next to the chair. He fixed Zayeed with eyes that were almost hypnotic. He felt like a deer caught in the headlights.

"Let me explain something to you, Doctor. Whatever control you think you have over this, think again. I'm giving you an offer you can't refuse. You give me your children, and in return, I will fund your project for the next twenty years. Set you up for life. And you will make more of them, just for us." He reached behind him and took his wife's hand. "We've always wanted to be...parents."

Zayeed felt as though he was encased in ice. His hands shook and he clasped them behind his back to hide his fear, lifting his chin in defiance. "And if I refuse?"

Treize smiled. It was a smile that said he'd almost enjoy it if Zayeed did refuse. "If you refuse, I'll take them anyway. I'll pull all funding for your project, and have you brought up on charges for public endangerment. And trust me, you will not win your case. You will spend decades in the most deplorable prison in the region and

you will never be allowed to work in another lab as long as you live. Your certification will be revoked and the public will know what you did. Every. Little. Detail. And even a few more if I'm feeling imaginative." He swept his hands out to the sides in a flair of false helplessness. "It's your choice, Doctor."

It was the moment when Zayeed realized he was not above begging. "Please. I implore you, Sir. Please do not take my children. I love them dearly."

"If you love them then you will do what I tell you to do and not make this any harder on yourself, or them."

Tears of rage were burgeoning behind his eyes and he blinked them back and bit his tongue hard. He would not cry in front of his callous, heartless man. "Sir..._please_..."

The Senator's eyes were hard, cold. "Are you going to give me what I want, or am I going to have to take it from you?" The jeweled hand curled into a fist and Zayeed wondered how many bones that fist could break if it collided with his face. He wasn't going to test that theory. Feeling defeated, weak, and utterly pathetic, he dropped his head in submission.

The fist uncurled and Treize clapped his hands together loudly. "Excellent. You made the right choice. I'll give you three days to get the boys prepared. Have that pretty little doctor of yours get that lab going again." He stood up and stepped over to Zayeed, laying a hand on his shoulder. It burned through his shirt and singed his skin which felt dirty and unwashed, thoroughly disgusted with himself. He wanted to turn his head and bite into the flesh, bite _through_ the flesh, and spit the amputated finger on the floor at the Senator's feet. He ground his teeth, resisting the impulse.

Treize leaned in, "My people will come to get them Wednesday at seven am sharp." He straightened up and strode to the door. "Come, darling."

Une shot him a menacing look as she paused next to him, her eyes almost black despite the well-lit room. "And don't try anything stupid. You cannot hide those boys from us so don't even think about trying. I know exactly what you're doing at all times and I will know if you attempt anything behind our backs. And if you _do_ go behind our backs, I will put a bullet in yours."

He heard the front door close and he dropped to his knees, legs finally giving out. Angry, helpless tears leaked from his eyes and he pounded the floor with his fist, spitting rage through his clenched teeth. "_Fuck!_ I'm so stupid...so stupid!" He bowed his head in shame. "Forgive me, boys. Forgive me for my weakness."

He raised his head and gazed at the ceiling with teary eyes. "What do I do now?"

End
file.